

Heaven's Songs

THEOLOGICAL THEME: Worship in heaven centers on the redeeming power of God demonstrated in the sacrifice of His Son.

While our singing in eternity will be better, our singing today is meaningful, important, and transformational too. When we sing, we affirm the gospel. Paul says that singing is a core piece of worshiping God because singing is an outflow of dwelling on God's Word and the gospel (Col. 3:16) and is a way we fight against sinful actions and speech (Eph. 5:18-19). Psalm 96, for example, tells us to sing to the Lord as a way of proclaiming salvation.

When we sing, we experience a dress rehearsal for eternity. As we will see in this session, we will sing praises to the Lord forever. Again, this is not *all* we will do, but it will be a core piece of what we will do. So as new creations in Christ, we proclaim to each other, and the world around us, what the perfection of eternity with God will be like tomorrow, today.



How does singing as a gathered church help you feel connected to God?

99 Essential Christian Doctrines

89. *Worship*

While many reduce worship to an event or the singing of worship songs, worship is first and foremost something of the heart and extends to all areas of life. The aim and focus of worship is God, giving Him the exact due of praise and adoration that He deserves. Worship should be carried out not only at a personal level within a Christian's life but also in joining with other Christians in the corporate act of worship and stewarding our gifts for the glory of God. Corporate worship serves to edify and strengthen other Christians, but it also serves as a witness to non-believers of the greatness of God.

In this session, we will continue our study of Revelation, which teaches us that not only does the purpose of our singing matter but so also the content of what we sing. It is not enough that we merely sing; to whom we are singing and why we are singing to Him are important as well. We will trace two songs of praise to God in Revelation 4–5 to help us see that we sing to our God who is holy, powerful, and eternal and who created everything. We will then see that we also sing to the Lamb who redeemed people by His blood and who reigns forever.

1. Praise the God who is holy, powerful, and eternal (Rev. 4:2-8).

² At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne. ³ And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald. ⁴ Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads. ⁵ From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God, ⁶ and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal.

And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: ⁷ the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight. ⁸ And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say,

*“Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty,
who was and is and is to come!”*

God is holy.

To say God is holy is to say He is set apart or unique. There is nothing and no one like God, which is why those around the throne do not merely declare God is holy. They say more—He is *holy, holy, holy*. He is three-times holy. Triple-holy.

For Christians reading Revelation, this triple use of holy reminds us of God’s three-ness—He is one God in three Persons. The triune God exhibits absolutely beauty and majesty with unmatched holiness—a holy, holy, holy God.

God is powerful.

God's infinite power is one way He is set apart from His creation. The power we observe in nature, harness in laboratories, and produce in generators is too weak, insignificant, and limited to even measure on the same scale as God's unending power. It is this power, God's omnipotence, on display around the throne that John describes as "flashes of lightning," "peals of thunder," and "torches of fire."

God is eternal.

When we think of eternity, we often think of time having no end. It just keeps going forever. But when we say God is eternal, we say much more than that. It's not that God just lives forever, although He certainly does. When it comes to God being eternal, we speak of His essence—we describe a fundamental part of His nature. God is eternal in that He exists outside of time.



Voices from the Church

"True theology galvanizes our affections toward God, not toward theology."¹

—Jared C. Wilson

Time is a way to measure spaces between beginnings and endings, and it gives us a backdrop to evaluate how things change. But God has no beginning or ending and He does not change. He does not grow old, tired, or weary. God is eternal, and therefore, He is totally unlike us. As those around the throne proclaim, He *was* (He has always existed), He *is* (He exists now), and He *is to come* (He will always exist).



Why should we always start with God's character and not just our own feelings when we worship?

This scene of worship in Revelation is built around these basic theological affirmations about God, and our worship today should be the same. Our knowledge of God through the Scriptures should direct our hearts, minds, and mouths to proper worship. And when we sing, we sing the good news of who God is and what He has done to us and those around us. This is a song we sing now and will sing forever.



What are some of your favorite hymns and songs to sing reflecting who God is?

2. Praise the God who created everything (Rev. 4:9-11).

⁹ And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, ¹⁰ the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying,

*¹¹ “Worthy are you,
our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will
they existed and were created.”*

When seeing the throne of a God who is radiating a heavenly thunderstorm so powerful that words to describe it fail you, it is hard not to fall on your face in worship. But when you think of the power and glory of the One who created all that we know (and what we do not know too) by the power of His spoken word, it keeps you down on your face. God’s creative power is unfathomable to us.



What aspects of creation lead you to worship God the most? Why?

What do the elders around the throne mean when they say by God’s will everything exists and was created? To be created by the will of God means that 1) we were created because He wanted to create us and 2) we were created to live a certain way. The elders around the throne sing praise to God for creating us because He did not have to create us, yet He did.



How does being created according to the will of God in both senses impact how you view yourself and your life?

3. Praise the Lamb who redeemed people by His blood (Rev. 5:1-10).

¹ Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals. ² And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?” ³ And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, ⁴ and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. ⁵ And one of the elders said to me, “Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.”

⁶ And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. ⁷ And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. ⁸ And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. ⁹ And they sang a new song, saying,

*“Worthy are you to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
for you were slain,
and by your blood you ransomed people for God
from every tribe and language
and people and nation,
¹⁰ and you have made them a kingdom
and priests to our God,
and they shall reign on the earth.”*

We know that God the Father is on the throne, but at the same time, we can know that Jesus is on the throne too. So whether Jesus is seated in a special place at the throne or near the throne, we know He is *on* the throne with His Father. John describing Jesus as “near” the throne instead of “on” the throne was not to minimize Jesus’ authority in any way. He was trying to convey the exact opposite—that Jesus is to be esteemed as the King of kings because He is not bowing at the throne, but instead, He is *bowed to* by those worshiping around the throne.



How does the picture of Jesus near the throne bring you comfort and hope today?

As John focuses his attention on Jesus near the throne, he describes Him as a slaughtered lamb who purchased people by His blood. This pictures Jesus’ death on the cross, where He substituted Himself in our place, and His resurrection because John does not see a slaughtered lamb lying down dead but standing up very much alive.

Only a perfect God can forgive sins, and only a perfect man can die as a substitute for imperfect men. So God the Son stepped into human history to die as the final, ultimate sacrificial Lamb. The slaughtered lambs of the Bible were pointing to the Lamb of God who would once and for all take away the sins of the world (John 1:29; Heb. 10:1-18).



Voices from Church History

“Therefore everything which Christ has is ours, graciously bestowed on us unworthy men out of God’s sheer mercy.”²

—Martin Luther (1483-1546)



What does reading of Jesus as the slaughtered Lamb make you think and feel?

4. Praise the Lamb who reigns forever (Rev. 5:11-14).

¹¹ *Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands,*

¹² *saying with a loud voice,*

*“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain,
to receive power and wealth
and wisdom and might
and honor and glory and blessing!”*

¹³ *And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying,*

*“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be blessing and honor and glory and might
forever and ever!”*

¹⁴ *And the four living creatures said, “Amen!” and the elders fell down and worshiped.*

Again, we see Jesus at the throne, being worshiped as One with authority and divine power. The language used is the same as other Scripture passages where divine worship is portrayed: “worthy,” “glory,” “honor.” And this worship will never end—it will go on in an amazing crescendo of praise forever and ever.



How should God's attributes—such as His love, holiness, and power—guide how we worship Him now in preparation for eternity?

God is not just a concept; He is real and He is perfectly good, and therefore, He is worthy of our worship. This is why the creatures, angels, and elders gather around the throne in heaven and sing to Him without end. They do not worship Him because they *have* to—they worship Him because He is loving, kind, awesome, glorious, and good. God's character compels worship.

But let us not stop there. Just as God's love overflowed to us in creation and in salvation, may our love for God overflow into proclaiming the gospel to everyone who will hear it. May we be so enthralled with God and so burdened for people that we cannot help but invest all we can—all we have—into bringing them together. Our King will reign forever, and those who confess His name and believe His gospel will reign forever with Him. That is the hope to which we look forward and that is the hope that we share.



Voices from Church History

"I agree that we don't 'demand crystal perfection in other men,' nor do we find it. But if there is one Man in whom we do find it, and if that one Man also claims to be more than man, what then?"³

—C. S. Lewis (1898-1963)



How does worship of God fuel evangelism?

Conclusion

Revelation 4–5 gives us two snapshots of amazing worship of God. While some of the imagery is mysterious and confusing, one thing is clear and compelling: Our God deserves our worship because of the greatness of who He is and what He has done. God has given us ample cause to worship Him in His holiness, power, glory, love, mercy, and grace, all of which we see most clearly in the provision of Jesus. It is because of Jesus, the resurrected slaughtered Lamb, that we are able to worship God, let alone enter His presence. And it is because of Jesus that we will be with God forever, worshiping in various ways without end. But that worship does not start one day in the future—it begins now, today, as we sing to God with the gathered church and as that song carries over into our communities for all the world to hear the glories of our God.

CHRIST CONNECTION: When John saw that no one was worthy to open the scroll or break its seals, he wept. Then he saw the slaughtered Lamb on the throne—Jesus, the Son of God who was slain for our redemption. Jesus is the One worthy of all praise and honor and blessing.

HIS MISSION, YOUR MISSION

MISSIONAL APPLICATION: God calls us to worship here on earth in anticipation of our worship of the Lamb in heaven.

1. How are you challenged to worship God in light of the songs in the Book of Revelation?

2. How can you use your worship of the Lamb—Jesus Christ—to proclaim the gospel in the world?

3. What are some specific circumstances in your life or the lives of others in which the Lamb reigning forever is praiseworthy news?

SESSION 1

1. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1964, reprint), 79.
2. Robert Smith Jr., quoted in "Know Your Southern Baptists: Robert Smith, Jr." by Trevin Wax, *The Gospel Coalition*, May 1, 2015, <https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/trevinwax/2015/05/01/know-your-southern-baptists-robert-smith-jr>.

SESSION 2

1. Thomas Helwys, quoted in "Introduction," by Richard Groves, in *A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity*, by Thomas Helwys (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998), xxiv.
2. Matt Chandler, Eric Geiger, and Josh Patterson, *Creature of the Word: The Jesus-Centered Church* (Nashville: B&H, 2012), 176.
3. Andrew Fuller, "The Work and Encouragements of the Christian Minister," in *The Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, vol. II (Boston: Lincoln, Edmands & Co., 1833), 407.

SESSION 3

1. William Cowper, "God Moves in a Mysterious Way," *Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville: LifeWay Worship, 2008), 664.
2. John Wesley, Letter XXV, in *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley*, vol. XVI (London: Thomas Cordeux, 1813), 183.

SESSION 4

1. J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1973), 81.
2. Tertullian, *Apologeticus*, in *Ante-Nicene Christian Library*, vol. XI, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1869), 139.
3. A. W. Tozer, *The Root of the Righteous* (Chicago: Moody, 2015), 79.
4. "Words of Mr. Moody" in *Northwestern Christian Advocate*, vol. 47, no. 52, December 27, 1899: 19.

SESSION 5

1. C. S. Lewis, quoted in *Is Your Lord Large Enough? How C. S. Lewis Expands Our View of God*, by Peter J. Schakel (Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 112.
2. Handley Moule, quoted in *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 2nd ed., by Robert L. Reymond (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 397.
3. Andreas J. Köstenberger, in *CSB Study Bible* (Nashville: B&H, 2017), 1895, n. 1:18.
4. E. Y. Mullins, *Studies in Colossians* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1957), 78.

SESSION 6

1. Frederick Douglass, quoted in *The Complete Works of C. H. Spurgeon, Volume 69: Autobiography—Diary, Letters, and Records, Vol. 4*, by Charles H. Spurgeon (Delmarva, 2013) [eBook].
2. Gerald Bray, *God Is Love: A Biblical and Systematic Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 671.
3. John the Dwarf, quoted in *Desert Banquet: A Year of Wisdom from the Desert Mothers and Fathers*, by David G. R. Keller (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011), 245.

SESSION 7

1. Jim Collins, *Good to Great* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 83–85.
2. Henry Alford, "The State of the Blessed Dead," in *Advent Sermons*, 2nd ed. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1872), 50.
3. John Wycliffe, quoted in *Civilization's Quotations: Life's Ideal*, ed. Richard Alan Krieger (Algora Publishing, 2002), 82.
4. John Knox, quoted in *The Christian Treasury*, vol. 15 (Edinburgh: Johnstone, Hunter, and Co., 1859), 180.

SESSION 8

1. "Aircraft in the Sky at Any Given Time," Federal Aviation Administration, July 31, 2017, https://www.faa.gov/air_traffic/by_the_numbers.
2. A. B. Simpson, quoted in *Simple Gospel: The Modern Offense of the Cross*, by Joshua West (Bloomington, IN: WestBow Press, 2017) [eBook].
3. Elisabeth Elliot, quoted in *Wisdom from Myles Munroe* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2010) [eBook].
4. John Charles Ryle, *Knots Untied* (London: National Protestant Church Union and Charles Murray, 1898), 449.
5. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 10.2, in *Readings in Church History*, ed. Jonathan Marshall (Hiram, ME: Hubbard Hill Press, 2009) [eBook].

SESSION 9

1. Burk Parsons, "In God We Trust," Ligonier Ministries, September 1, 2004, <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/god-we-trust>.
2. Joni Eareckson Tada, *Heaven: Your Real Home* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 131.
3. Saint John Chrysostom, Homily IV, *On the Acts of the Apostles* (London: Aeterna Press, 2015) [eBook].

SESSION 10

1. Randy Alcorn, *Heaven* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 2004) [eBook].
2. Dennis E. Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb: A Commentary on Revelation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001), 60.
3. Richard Sibbes, *Bruised Reed and a Description of Christ* (Post Tenebras Lux Books, 2010), 20.
4. John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 35.

SESSION 11

1. Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991), 8.
2. Jim Elliff, "The Change of Mind," *Christian Communicators Worldwide*, 2002, <http://www.ccwtoday.org/article/the-change-of-mind>.
3. Ambrose, *Concerning Repentance*, 2.1.5, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series*, vol. 10, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wallace (New York: Cosimo, 2007), 345.
4. Vance Havner, quoted in *The Westminster Collection of Christian Quotations*, ed. Martin H. Manser (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 75.
5. Paul L. Steinke, *A Door Set Open: Grounding Change in Mission and Hope* (Herdndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2010) [eBook].

SESSION 12

1. Jared C. Wilson, *Gospel Wakefulness* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011), 84.
2. Martin Luther, in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 3rd ed., eds. Timothy F. Lull and William R. Russell (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012) [eBook].
3. C. S. Lewis, in *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis, Volume III: Narnia, Cambridge, and Joy 1950–1963*, ed. Walter Hooper (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 1377–78.

SESSION 13

1. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Faith Speaking Understanding: Performing the Drama of Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 30.
2. C. H. Spurgeon, "Paul's Desire to Depart," in *Spurgeon: New Park Street Pulpit: 347 Sermons from the Prince of Preachers* (BookBaby, 2012) [eBook].
3. J. A. Medders and Brandon D. Smith, *Rooted: Theology for Growing Christians* (Spring Hill, TN: Rainer Publishing, 2016), 140–41.
4. Jerome, Letters XXII, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series*, vol. VI, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wallace (New York: Cosimo, 2007), 41.

The Gospel Project®

Adult Personal Study Guide ESV
Volume 6, Number 4 Summer 2018

Eric Geiger

Senior Vice President, LifeWay Resources

Ed Stetzer and Trevin Wax

General Editors

Brian Dembowczyk

Managing Editor

Daniel Davis

Content Editor

Josh Hayes

Content and Production Editor

Ken Braddy

Manager, Adult Ongoing Bible Studies

Michael Kelley

Director, Groups Ministry

Send questions/comments to:

Content Editor by email to
daniel.davis@lifeway.com or mail to
Content Editor, *The Gospel Project*;
Adult Personal Study Guide, One LifeWay Plaza,
Nashville, TN 37234-0102; or make comments
on the Web at lifeway.com.

Printed in the United States of America

The Gospel Project®: Adult Personal Study Guide ESV
(ISSN 2330-9393; Item 005573553) is published
quarterly by LifeWay Christian Resources,
One LifeWay Plaza, Nashville, TN 37234,
Thom S. Rainer, President. © 2018 LifeWay
Christian Resources.

For ordering or inquiries, visit lifeway.com, or
write LifeWay Resources Customer Service, One
LifeWay Plaza, Nashville, TN 37234-0113. For bulk
shipments mailed quarterly to one address, email
orderentry@lifeway.com, fax 615.251.5933, or write
to the above address.

We believe that the Bible has God for its author;
salvation for its end; and truth, without any
mixture of error, for its matter and that all
Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. To
review LifeWay's doctrinal guideline, please visit
www.lifeway.com/doctrinalguideline.

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are
taken from the English Standard Version® (The Holy
Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright 2001
by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News
Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

About the Writers

Unit 2:

Robert Smith Jr. (sessions 7-9) is a professor of Christian preaching and holds the Charles T. Carter Baptist Chair of Divinity at Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, Alabama. He is the author of *Doctrine That Dances* and *The Oasis of God*. He is married to Dr. Wanda Taylor-Smith, and they have four adult children with one in heaven.



Brandon D. Smith (sessions 10-13) works with the Christian Standard Bible and co-hosts the Word Matters podcast. He is the author of *Rooted: Theology for Growing Christians* and *They Spoke of Me: How Jesus Unlocks the Old Testament*. He and his wife live near Nashville, Tennessee, with their two daughters.

